

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BONN 11966 151608Z

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BONN 11966

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NATO, MPOL, GW

SUBJECT: GERMAN PRES REACTION TO AGREEMENT ON TANK
STANDARDIZATION

1. THE GERMAN PRESS REACTION TO THE REPORTED AGREEMENT
BETWEEN SECRETARY RUMSFELD AND MINISTER LEBER ON A
STANDARD TANK HAS REFLECTED THE CONTINUED GERMAN HOPES
AND FEARS REGARDING THE ENTIRE TANK PRODUCTION PROGRAM.

2. THE EARLY PRESS REACTION, BASED ON REPORTS OF THE
US-FRG AGREEMENT, REFLECTED GERMAN SUSPICIONS THAT
THEY HAD LOST THE BATTLE. "DIE WELT" (RIGHT CENTER)
DESCRIBED THE AGREEMENT AS A "TOTAL DEFEAT" FOR LEBER
AND FOR THE LEOPARD. THE "HANNOVERSCHE ALLGEMEINE
ZEITUNG" (CENTER, INDEPENDENT) TERMED THE AGREEMENT
"LEBER'S TRICK" AND ALSO ALLEGED THAT LEBER HAD BEEN
DEFEATED. BOTH PAPERS RAISED THE QUESTION WHETHER THE
U.S. WAS REALLY READY FOR A "TWO-WAY STREET." OTHER
NEWSPAPERS ACROSS THE BOARD GENERALLY HAD SIMILAR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BONN 11966 151608Z

REACTIONS, SPEAKING OF "DEFEAT" AND OF THE "SACRIFICE"

OF THE LEOPARD. ONLY EMIL BOELTE, WRITING IN THE "WESTFAELISCHE ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG" (INDEPENDENT) FROM WASHINGTON, SAID THAT LEBER HAD DEFENDED GERMAN INTERESTS AND THAT THE AMERICANS HAD YIELDED BY AGREEING TO ACCEPT GERMAN PARTS IN A COMMON TANK.

3. AFTER A FEW MORE DAYS, AND PRESUMABLY A FEW MORE BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS BY THE MINISTER AND HIS COLLEAGUES, THE TONE HERE HAS CHANGED SOMEWHAT. VON RAVEN, WRITING IN "DIE WELT", ASKED WHETHER IT WAS REALLY SURPRISING THAT THE AMERICANS SHOULD NOT WANT TO HAVE ANY TANK OTHER THAN THEIR OWN. HE DESCRIBED SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES OF VIEW REGARDING THE 105 AND 120MM GUNS IN OBJECTIVE TERMS. POTYKA, OF THE "SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG" (INDEPENDENT, LIBERAL) SAID THAT A "LEO-MIX" WOULD BE BUILT RATHER THAN A "LEO-PUR." ADDING THAT THE U.S. COULD HARDLY BE EXPECTED TO USE ANY TANK OTHER THAN ITS OWN, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE ENORMOUS EXPORT MARKET, HE OBSERVED THAT EVEN COMPONENT PRODUCTION WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT AS WELL AS A CONTRIBUTION TO INTEROPERABILITY.

4. AN EDITORIAL IN THE "FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE" (CONSERVATIVE, INDEPENDENT) ALSO SUGGESTED THAT HOPES FOR THE LEOPARD HAD BEEN UNREALISTIC AND THAT PERHAPS THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN UNPLEASANT POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR A GERMAN TANK TO BE EXPORTED IN LARGE QUANTITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD (NOT DEALING WITH THE QUESTION OF GERMAN PARTS IN A COMMON TANK). THE "FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE" ADDED THAT THE GERMAN ARMY COULD PROBABLY NOT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO BUY AN AMERICAN TANK SINCE THE LEOPARD WAS SO GOOD, AND THAT SOME STANDARDIZATION COMPROMISE APPEARED TO BE THE ANSWER.

5. THE GERMAN PRESS REACTION DEMONSTRATES THE EXTREME SENSITIVITY THAT STILL SURROUNDS THE LEOPARD ISSUE IN THIS COUNTRY. ANY COMPROMISE APPEARED TO SMACK OF DEFEAT UNTIL IT WAS PROPERLY (AND PERHAPS ENDLESSLY) EXPLAINED. UNFORTUNATELY, IN THE PROCESS OF JUSTIFYING THE COMPROMISE, LEBER HAD TO SUGGEST THAT EVEN THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BONN 11966 151608Z

INITIAL GERMAN HOPES HAD BEEN UNREALISTIC. IN SO DOING HE PROVIDED ADDITIONAL FUEL TO THOSE WHO SUGGESTED THAT THE U.S. HAD NEVER BEEN SERIOUS ABOUT BUYING A GERMAN TANK, NO MATTER HOW GOOD THE TANK MIGHT BE.

6. THE REACTION NOW APPEARS TO HAVE CALMED DOWN, BUT WE WOULD EXPECT THE ISSUE TO SURFACE AGAIN AT ALMOST ANY MOMENT DURING THE TESTING TIME OF THE TANK OR IN

CONNECTION WITH DECISIONS ON TANK PURCHASE.

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